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SUBJECT: CAMEROON: BAKASSI'S ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY

REF: A. 08 YAOUNDE 1047
[1](#)B. 08 YAOUNDE 1041
[1](#)C. 08 YAOUNDE 817

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: One year after the August 2008 handover of the Bakassi Peninsula, the Government of Cameroon(GRC) has succeeded in dramatically improving the security of the region and has done some work to improve infrastructure. However, Bakassi remains poor and isolated, and the inter-agency development approach has underperformed. Cameroon believes its relationship with Nigeria is on a positive trajectory. END SUMMARY.

Background

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Greentree Agreement was signed in 2006 by Cameroonian President Paul Biya, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, ex-Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Anan, and by representatives of the United States, Germany, Great Britain, and France. The agreement implemented a 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision conferring Cameroonian sovereignty over the potentially oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula. The ICJ ruling and Greentree Agreement peacefully resolved a decades-old territorial dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon which had sparked several conflicts in 1981 and the early 1990s. Greentree allowed for a five-year transition period (from 2008 to 2013), after which time Bakassi will be fully part of Cameroon.

Development Getting Off the Ground

[1](#)3. (SBU) Soon after the Bakassi handover from Nigeria to Cameroon on August 14, 2008, the GRC formed an inter-agency development committee for the region. The committee, headed by the Office of the Prime Minister, developed a guide to development in the Bakassi region, and all ministries have been instructed to use this guide in prioritizing projects in the region (ref A). Jacob Ketuma Lukunze, the ministerial-level point person for Bakassi at the Prime Minister's office, told Poloff recently that development is advancing in the region and that the Bakassi is "totally calm." According to Lukunze, the major impediments to development in Bakassi are: the lack of potable water (wells dug are often contaminated by oil underground), inadequate electricity supplies (due to the difficulty of transporting gas in the region, generators are also not viable alternatives), security, and the difficulty of moving goods around the Bakassi area. In spite of these hurdles, PAMOL, a palm oil plantation, has recently announced that it will expand into the Bakassi Region and hopes to create 150 new jobs.

14. (SBU) The head of a leading non-governmental organization (NGO) working in the Bakassi region, Bakassi Youth Forum for Peace and Sustainable Development, recently told Pol Specialist that although infrastructure projects such as roads, schools, and government buildings have advanced on the peninsula, there has been little development of projects in the areas of vocational training, income generation and capacity building. The Director told post that he is concerned about this lack of training, as unemployed, disillusioned youth are a prime target for recruitment by the Bakassi Freedom Fighters (BFF), a local militant group linked to Nigeria's Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

Extensive Press Coverage

15. (U) Media coverage of the one-year anniversary has been extensive. State-owned press covered the occasion by praising the government for its infrastructure and development work, while privately-owned press highlighted the many development challenges faced by the region. The press has acknowledged the advances that have been made, but many feel that more needs to be done. There has been some Nigerian and Internet coverage of the resettlement village (New Bakassi) reportedly built in Nigeria for the 35,000 Nigerians who chose to return to Nigeria. As of August 2009, none had arrived to live in this village, according to press reports. Except for the one-year anniversary, Bakassi does not usually feature prominently in Cameroonian dailies.

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Comment

16. (SBU) Cameroon's elite Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), with USG support, has been effective at dramatically improving security in the Bakassi area. Before the BIR took over this mission, Bakassi was the scene of a number of violent attacks against security personnel. Security has improved due to the BIR's presence and the recent laying down of arms by several key leaders in the Bakassi Freedom Fighters organization. Because of security concerns and the difficulty of transportation in the area, Embassy personnel have not traveled to Bakassi, making it difficult to assess progress over the past year.

17. (SBU) Cameroonian sources tell us that relations with Nigeria have continued to improve following the 2008 handover and subsequent positive Joint Commission meeting, with ever-growing but still limited economic and security ties. A recent meeting in Yaounde of the Mixed Commission to delineate the Cameroon-Nigerian border reported good progress, with the first border pillar expected to be laid in the next few months. However, the Nigerian Head of the Delegation to the Mixed Commission, S.M. Diggi, publicly noted two problems: first, he said oil and gas companies needed to be involved in determining the maritime boundary; and second, he said the GRC was dragging its feet on approving a World Bank plan for the Trans-African highway. Cameroonians still give the U.S. major credit for helping facilitate the Greentree Agreement, and the Bakassi handover is still viewed here as one of President Biya's most significant accomplishments.

PETERSON